CHAPTER ONE

Fostering Transformative Learning

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Fostering transformative learning is seen as teaching for change—a practice of education that is ''predicated on the idea that students are seriously challenged to assess their value system and worldview and are subsequently changed by the experience'' (Quinnan, 1997, p. 42). It involves the most significant learning in adulthood, that of communicative learning, which entails the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings; critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building (Mezirow, 1995; Mezirow & Associates, 2000).

Despite this understanding, the practice of fostering transformative learning is illusive and an ever-shifting approach to teaching, and much about it remains unknown or poorly understood. Like any other educational approach, it is rooted in ideals, and when the realities of practice are explored, it becomes difficult to get a handle on how it plays out in the classroom. It is also laced with contradictions and oversights. For example, how does an educator foster a change in perspective among learners within a theoretical orientation that advocates a learner-centered approach to teaching, free of coercion, and assumes ''the educational experience is never value neutral'' (Ettling, 2006, p. 60)? This question is further complicated when layered with the lens of positionality, a concept overlooked in Mezirow's conception of transformative learning.

Another factor often not discussed or given much consideration is the varied contexts in which educators engage transformative learning and how these contexts shape practice. Although most of the research on incorporating transformative learning practices has taken place in higher education settings, recent research has demonstrated transformative learning in human resources and training, cooperative extension, faculty development programs, and distance education, to mention just a few. Little is known about the unique challenges that emerge in these contexts and how transformative learning is conceptualized in both purpose and practice (Taylor, 2007).

In response to these challenges and unanswered questions, my goal in this chapter is to identify what I see as the core elements of fostering transformative learning that have emerged from the empirical literature. This discussion helps set the stage for the rest of the book, providing a backdrop to what is known about fostering transformative learning as readers reflect on the various settings and practices illustrated in each chapter.

CORE ELEMENTS

Core elements are the essential components that frame a transformative approach to teaching. These elements, based on the literature, seem to be part of most transformative educational experiences. Originally three such elements were identified: individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue (Taylor, 1998). However, as the study of transformative learning has evolved, other elements have emerged as equally significant: a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and an authentic practice. Moreover, the conceptualizations of some of the original elements have evolved as well. For example, while critical reflection was at one time predominantly seen as a rational approach to learning, research has revealed that it is the affective ways of knowing that prioritize experience and identify for the learner what is personally most significant in the process of reflection.

It is important to note that these elements have an interdependent relationship; they do not stand alone. For example, without individual experience, there is little or nothing to engage in critical reflection. Similarly, developing an authentic practice is significant for fostering trusting relationships between learners and teacher, which often provides the safe environment for learners to engage in critical reflection, ultimately allowing transformative learning to take place.

In addition, it is important to recognize that these elements are not a series of decontextualized teaching techniques or strategies that can be applied arbitrarily without an appreciation for their connection to a larger theoretical framework of transformative learning theory. These elements are rooted in

deeply held assumptions about the nature of adult learning and purposes of teaching for change. Those assumptions and the nature of that change are part and parcel of an educator's transformative theoretical orientation. It is the reciprocal relationship between the core elements and the theoretical orientation of transformative learning that provides a lens for making meaning and guiding a transformative practice. To engage in the application of these core elements without some awareness of a larger theoretical orientation and its underlying purpose is not transformative learning. It is rudderless teaching, with no clear goal or purpose.

Developing an awareness of a theoretical orientation to transformative learning is therefore important. Further challenging the educator is the existence of multiple theoretical orientations to transformative learning beyond Mezirow's original conception. These orientations tend to fall loosely into two theoretical frameworks (Taylor, 2008). One framework, espoused by Jack Mezirow, Laurent Daloz, John Dirkx, Robert Kegan, and Patricia Cranton, among others, involves a collection of theoretical orientations that emphasize personal transformation and growth, where the unit of analysis is primarily the individual, with little attention given to the role of context and social change in the transformative experience. Core elements in this orientation, such as critical reflection, emphasize self-critique of deeply held assumptions, which leads to greater personal awareness in relationship to others. The second framework of theoretical orientations, espoused, for example, by Paulo Freire, Elizabeth Tisdell, Juanita Johnson-Bailey, and Mary Alfred, sees fostering transformative learning as being as much about social change as personal transformation, where individual and social transformation are inherently linked. Critical reflection in this orientation is more about ideological critique, where learners develop an awareness of power and greater agency (political consciousness) to transform society and their own reality. All that being said, how these elements are interpreted and engaged in the classroom is therefore significantly shaped by the theoretical orientation of the educator (Taylor, 2008).

Finally, it is important to note that this discussion of core elements is an evolving process, and the elements identified are a continual work of progress, particularly as more research comes forth. The identification of these elements emerges from a series of literature reviews of empirical studies on transformative learning completed over the past decade. Each of the elements is discussed in relationship to empirical literature about fostering transformative learning.

Individual Experience

Individual experience, the primary medium of transformative learning, consists of what each learner brings (prior experiences) and also what he or she experiences within the ''classroom'' itself. It ''constitutes a starting point for

discourse leading to critical examination of normative assumptions underpinning the learner's . . .value judgments or normative expectations'' (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 31). Experience is also what educators stimulate and create through classroom activities and learners and teachers reflect on as they learn new ideas about themselves and their world. It is seen as socially constructed, so that it can be deconstructed and acted on through a process of dialogue and self-reflection. Although an understanding of the nature of experience in relationship to transformative learning is limited, research offers some insight into both prior experience and classroom-created experience.

Of significance seems to be the degree of life experience when fostering transformative learning. A greater life experience provides a deeper well from which to draw on and react to as individuals engage in dialogue and reflection. For example, Cragg, Plotnikoff, Hugo, and Casey (2001), in a study exploring transformation of professional values among graduate students enrolled in R.N. and B.S.N. nursing programs in a variety of settings (distance, hybrid, generic), found that ''nurses with more experience are more likely to internalize the new points of view to which their education exposes them'' (p. 6). Furthermore, it is also important to recognize what learners are experiencing in their life as they enter the classroom. It is the nature of the experiences that offer the means for fostering transformative learning. For example, Lange (2004), in a study on revitalizing citizen action, found that students who were participating in a continuing education certificate program were experiencing disillusionment and fragmentation in their lives. Educators saw these experiences as ''pedagogical entry points'' (p. 129) that offered opportunities for engaging a learner's personal dilemma as a potentially transformative experience.

In addition to prior experience, it is also important to consider what kind of individual and group experiences educators attempt to create in the classroom in order to foster transformative learning. Research has revealed that value-laden course content and intense experiential activities offer experiences that can be a catalyst for critical reflection and can provide an opportunity to promote transformative learning. Value-laden course content can both provoke and provide a process for facilitating change. For example, content about AIDS, abortion, wellness, spirituality, death, and dying have been found to encourage learners to reflect on both their personal and professional values, which at times can be in conflict with each other (Taylor, 2000). Also, content found in the medium of text can provide a catalyst for reflection, resulting in not only a greater understanding of the text but also greater personal insight (Kritskaya & Dirkx, 1999). For example, romantic fiction has been used as a means to help women question traditional conceptions of romantic relationships and redefine power located in relationships. Jarvis (2003) found that ''narrative organization and point of view may lead readers to identify with characteristics, whose values and actions are in opposition to their own. Reflection on this

identification may challenge existing meaning perspectives at the personal or sociocultural level'' (p. 265).

Along with value-laden course content is the application of intense experiential activities within the classroom. These activities help provoke meaning making among the participants by acting as triggers or disorienting dilemmas, provoking critical reflection, and facilitating transformative learning, allowing learners to experience learning more directly and holistically. For example, in order to develop an awareness of the African American struggles for civil rights among preservice teachers, Herber (1998) developed a series of experiential activities designed to initiate and facilitate the transformative process. One activity included a tour of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, with the objective of documenting the ongoing struggle for equality in a diverse society. She found that the museum tour served as a catalyst for the transformative process for several of the learners. More important, she learned ''that adult learners can confront a difficult and painful social issue, they can become aware of perceptual distortions about race, they can move to a more inclusive permeable perspective through experiential learning, reflection, and discussion in a context that supports the questioning of assumptions'' (p. 158). Similarly, an educational program for medical students on palliative care requires students to spend time with a dying patient and family members ''hearing their stories and exploring issues of importance to them'' (MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon, & Robertson, 2003, p. 58). A consequence of this direct and intense experience is often an emotional one, prompting critical reflection and in this case leading to empathy—both knowing what the patient and family have experienced and a recognition of the emotions generated by that experience.

As these findings suggest, both prior experiences and those created in the classroom through activities, readings, and relationships with other learners provide the gist for critical reflection and classroom dialogue. It is this interdependent relationship between experience and critical reflection that potentially leads to a new perspective.

Promoting Critical Reflection

The second core element of fostering transformative learning is the promotion of critical reflection among learners. Critical reflection, a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning, refers to questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience. It is often prompted in response to an awareness of conflicting thoughts, feelings, and actions and at times can lead to a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000). There are three forms of reflection in the transformation of meaning perspectives: content (reflecting on what we perceive, think, feel, and act), process (reflecting on how we perform the functions of perceiving), and premise (an awareness of why we perceive). Premise reflection, the least common of the three and the

basis for critical reflection, refers to examining the presuppositions underlying our knowledge of the world. Recently premise reflection has been purported as a form of reflection that needs to be engaged sooner and more often, particularly among those who have greater experience (Kreber, 2004).

Learning to be critically reflective is seen by some to rest on ''mature cognitive development'' (Merriam, 2004, p. 65). For example, in a longitudinal study, Liimatainen, Poskiparta, Karhila, and Sjögren (2001) explored the development of reflective learning and found differences among nursing students in reaching critical consciousness during their education program. Some students evolved to become ''critical reflectors,'' where their ''schemas indicated communicative and transformative learning and features of an empowerment approach to health promotion'' (p. 656). Other students, both nonreflectors and reflectors, demonstrated less development during their time in the program and stayed at a level of reflection indicative of schemata that emphasized technical rationality.

In another example, Kreber (2004) looked at the levels of reflection using categories developed by Mezirow, such as content, process, and premise, in relationship to three domains of teaching knowledge: instructional (design and processes), pedagogical (student learning), and curricular (goals and purposes of courses). She found that premise reflection was the least common among participants of any of domains of teaching knowledge, although more experienced staff found knowing through process and premise reflection within certain forms of knowledge (for example, pedagogical and instructional) more relevant than their younger counterparts did. She concluded that when learning about teaching, teachers need to begin with premise reflection in ''order to be more meaningful'' (p. 41), that is, more concerned with why they teach than with how or what to teach.

To assist educators in recognizing the development of critical reflection among learners, there are indicators that assess levels of reflection (Boyer, Maher, & Kirkman, 2006; Kreber, 2004; Liimatainen et al., 2001). Such indicators as levels, a repertory grid, and coding schemas lend a hand in categorizing reflection, offer examples for learners, and demonstrate how previous research has often been too arbitrary in identifying critical reflection. For example, one coding schema identified eight levels of reflection, from thoughtful action without reflection (level 0) to theoretical reflectivity (level 7), which is an ''awareness that routine or taken-for-granted practice may not be the complete answer, obvious learning from experience or change [in] perspective'' (Liimatainen et al., p. 654).

In addition to recognizing the development of critical reflection, recent research has identified instructional aids that assist in its maturation, such as writing both online and in reflective journals (Boyer, Maher, & Kirkman, 2006; Chimera, 2006; Kitchenham, 2006; Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2006).

The written format potentially strengthens the reflective experience by creating artifacts of ideas of the mind. It requires learners to externalize their reflective experience, taking the ''discussion away from the merely affective and/or psychological domains and forces a kind of reconciliation with the material-inherently perspective altering, socio-communicative activity'' (Burke, 2006, p. 85). Writing helps address a limitation of making sense of reflection, that which challenges learners to both recall from memory and verbally articulate reflective moments during their teaching practice, particularly about a phenomenon (teaching) that often operates at a tacit level. Writing provides a means for both reflecting and recording previous thoughts that can be shared with others and returned to and reflected on when most relevant.

Dialogue

Building on the importance of critical reflection is the engagement in dialogue with the self and others. Dialogue is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed. However, in contrast to everyday discussions, it is used most often in transformative learning ''when we have reason to question the comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness (in relation to norms), or authenticity (in relation to feelings) of what is being asserted or to question the credibility of the person making the statement'' (Mezirow, 1991, p. 77).

It is within the arena of dialogue that experience and critical reflection play out. Dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed. The dialogue is not so much analytical, point-counterpoint dialogue, but dialogue emphasizing relational and trustful communication, often at times ''highly personal and self-disclosing'' (Carter, 2002, p. 82). Again, the emphasis (personal or social transformation) is framed by educators' theoretical orientation to transformative learning. Although research is limited in this area concerning transformative learning, social interaction and dialogue have been found to lead to consensual validation (valid by the process of discussing it) among learners. This validation helps learners who, for example, were diagnosed HIV-positive and realized ''they were not alone on this transformational journey'' (Baumgartner, 2002, pp. 56–57).

Ideal conditions for participants to engage in reflective dialogue include the importance of providing ''the most accurate and complete information''; ensuring ''freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception; encouraging an openness to alternative points of view''; demonstrating ''empathy and concern about how others think and feel; developing an ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively''; developing ''greater awareness of the context of ideas and more critically reflective [sic] of assumptions''; ensuring ''an equal opportunity to participate in various roles of the discourse''; and ''encouraging a willingness to seek understanding and agreement to accept a resulting best

judgment as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgment'' (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, pp. 13–14).

In addition, it is important not only to create positive conditions for productive dialogue, but also to pay mind to the nature of the dialogue—what the participants are actually discussing. Research has revealed that dialogue helps identify the learner's ''edge of meaning,'' a transitional zone, of knowing and meaning making. ''It is this liminal space that we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits'' (Berger, 2004, p. 338). This edge of meaning was revealed in dialogue among graduate students in a master's in education program who at times had difficulty articulating ideas and coherent thoughts when discussing ontological issues about their personal lives—the way they make sense of their world. Also, the emotions of the students varied widely, from frightened and uncomfortable feelings to excitement and joy.

This study and others remind educators that engaging in dialogue is much more than having an analytical conversation; it involves an acute awareness of learners' attitudes, feelings, personalities, and preferences over time, and as signs of change and instability begin to emerge, educators can respond accordingly. It also means developing a sense of trust in the process of dialogue with others, creating a setting that helps learners live with some discomfort while on the edge of knowing, in the process of gaining new insights and understandings. A less analytical perspective of dialogue requires a more holistic orientation or approach to transformative learning, where the learner and the educator engage in other ways of knowing.

Holistic Orientation

A third essential component to fostering transformative learning is the emphasis on a holistic orientation to teaching. This orientation encourages the engagement with other ways of knowing—the affective and relational. Past research has demonstrated that often too much emphasis is given to rational discourse and critical reflection in the fostering of transformative learning and not enough recognition of the role of the affective and other ways of knowing (Taylor, 1998). As Brown (2006) concludes, learners rarely change through a rational process (analyze-think-change). Instead they ''are more likely to change in a see-feel-change sequence'' (p. 732). Affective knowing—developing an awareness of feelings and emotions in the reflective process—is inherent in critical reflection. There is an interdependent relationship between the physiological process of cognition and emotion. Emotions are inherently cognitive; they ''anticipate future needs, prepare for actions, and even prepare for thinking certain types of thoughts'' (Parrott &

Schulkin, 1993, p. 56). They often act as a trigger for the reflective process, prompting the learner to question deeply held assumptions.

Until recently, there had been little guidance provided to educators in how to engage in a holistic approach to transformative learning in the classroom, particularly the affective component. Along with didactic pedagogies, it means including opportunities for learners to experience presentational ways of knowing, such as ''engagement with music, all the plastic arts, dance, movement, and mime, as well as all forms of myth, fable, allegory, and drama'' (Davis-Manigualte, Yorks, & Kasl, 2006, p. 27). Other examples include the use of the arts (Berger, 2004; Hanlin-Rowney et al., 2006; Patteson, 2002), online group meditation (Hanlin-Rowney et al., 2006), and cultural autobiographies (Brown, 2006). Presentational or expressive ways of knowing are ''about inviting 'the whole person' into the classroom environment, we mean the person in fullness of being: as an affective, intuitive, thinking, physical, spiritual self'' (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 46). The affective domain of a holistic approach reveals much about the psycho- and sociocultural dynamics of the individual and the group within the classroom. Engaging emotions in the classroom provides ''an opportunity for establishing a dialogue with those unconscious aspects of ourselves seeking expression through various images, feelings, and behaviors within the learning setting'' (Dirkx, 2006, p. 22). Furthermore, by exploring emotional issues with students, the educator can address the dynamics that contribute to a resistance in learning, as well as potentially initiate a process of individuation—that of ''a deeper understanding, realization, and appreciation of who he or she is'' (p. 18).

To successfully engage expressive ways of knowing in the classroom, educators have to be prepared to work on their own holistic awareness, creating a learning environment conducive to whole person learning (for example, by adopting rituals or creating community) and modeling emphatic connections of learners' experiences through expressive activities, for example, by storytelling and cooperative inquiry. Furthermore, expressive ways of knowing provide the means to evoke experiences for greater exploration, help learners become more aware of their feelings and their relationship to sense making, and help concretize an experience allowing the learner to reexperience the learning experience through expressive representation (Taylor, 2006).

Awareness of Context

Developing an awareness of context when fostering transformative learning is developing a deeper appreciation and understanding of the personal and sociocultural factors that play an influencing role in the process of transformative learning. These factors include the surroundings of the immediate learning event, the personal and professional situation of the learners at the time (their prior experience), and the background context that is shaping society.

As previously discussed, the prior experience of learners potentially has a significant influence on practice. Insight into this experience reveals that some learners may have a greater predisposition for change. Early research demonstrated that participants with recent experiences of critical incidences in their lives seemed more predisposed to change. ''The disturbing events in the participants' lives. . .create a fertile ground for perspective transformation'' (Pierce, 1986, p. 296). The same is true of ''pedagogical entry points'' (Lange, 2004, p. 129) and when learners are in the transitional zone of meaning making (Berger, 2004).

The lack of or resistance to change can also be explained from a contextual perspective, particularly in terms of barriers that are in place or inhibit what is necessary for transformative learning—for example, rules and sanctions imposed on welfare women returning to work in a family empowerment project (Christopher, Dunnagan, Duncan, & Paul, 2001); the downside of cohort experiences where there is often an unequal distribution of group responsibilities and an emphasis on task completion instead of reflective dialogue (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001); rigid role assignments and the need for both the teachers and program developers to be deliberate at times for transformative learning to occur in educational programming (Taylor, 2003); and a culture of resistance to technology (Whitelaw, Sears, & Campbell, 2004). The online setting has its own unique challenges to overcome with fostering transformative learning due to the limitation of the written word. Hanlin-Rowney et al. (2006) found, in a collaborative online inquiry involving a group of graduate students, that overreliance ''on predominantly written communication can be misinterpreted without opportunities for face-to-face interaction'' (p. 330).

Environmentally one of the most significant contextual issues of transformative learning is temporal constraints. Research suggests that fostering transformative learning is time-consuming, particularly when an effort is being made to provide access to all participants' voices as well as coming to consensus around various group decisions. Furthermore, working with rigid time periods poses additional challenges when engaging intense personal experiences that cannot be resolved by the time class is over. These efforts are further compromised with a traditional classroom setting with short class periods. For example, in a collaborative inquiry project, Kaminsky (1997) found ''that inclusiveness in terms of stakeholder membership practically guarantees that groups will have different agendas about what needs to be done, making coming to a consensus an onerous, time-consuming task'' (pp. 274–275). The inquiry project involved an intense group experience of lengthy duration, and

even under these conditions, teachers and participants felt constrained by the exigency of time. It seems that the very conditions that foster transformative learning—a democratic process, inclusiveness of agendas, striving for consensus, critical reflection, dialogue—create a high demand for time.

Authentic Relationships

A sixth element is the importance of establishing authentic relationships with students. ''Fostering transformative learning in the classroom depends to a large extent on establishing meaningful, genuine relationships with students'' (Cranton, 2006, p. 5). Previous research found that establishing positive and productive relationships with others is one of the essential factors in a transformative experience (Taylor, 2007). It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, where transformation at times can be perceived as threatening and an emotionally charged experience. Recent research begins to offer insight into the complex nature of transformative relationships (Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001; Lyon, 2001). For example, Carter (2002), who explored learning in work-related developmental relationships involving midcareer women, identified four categories of relationships as significant to their learning at work: utilitarian relationships (acquiring skills and knowledge), love relationships (enhance self-image, friendship), memory relationships (of former or deceased individuals), and imaginative relationships (inner dialogue, meditation). Love, memory, and self-dialogue relationships proved significant to transformative learning, with intimate relationships the most significant.

Authentic relationships also allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information openly, and achieve greater mutual and consensual understanding. Without the medium of relationships, critical reflection is impotent and hollow, lacking the genuine discourse necessary for thoughtful and in-depth reflection (Taylor, 1998, 2006). Through authentic relationships, teachers and learners establish a foundation for transformative learning. The meaning of authenticity in the context of teaching is revealed in a five-facet model: (1) a strong sense of self-awareness, (2) a deep awareness of the needs and interest of learners and how they may differ from the interest of the educator, (3) fostering the ability (of the educator or student, for example) to be genuine and open with others, (4) developing awareness of how context shapes practice, and (5) engaging in critical reflection and critical self-reflection about practice (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). In essence, by striving for a more authentic practice, the educator is integrating all the core elements of fostering transformative learning.

CONCLUSION

These core elements seem fairly complete, except for one concept: learner-centered teaching. This is an approach to teaching where the teacher is seen as facilitator who strives to balance power with learners through shared decision making, evaluation, and other learning responsibilities in the classroom (Weimer, 2002). As a construct, it is discussed in the conceptual literature (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow & Associates, 2000) as central to fostering transformative learning; however, it has often been overlooked in the research literature. Although it is apparent that many studies have engaged a learner-centered teaching approach, few, if any, have explored in-depth what it looks like in practice, how it is managed, its related challenges, and the implications it has for fostering transformative learning.

Complicating the idea of learner-centered teaching as a core element is the question of whether it is a method that is simply employed like any other teaching technique or is a construct that acts as an umbrella for a whole collection of methods, including many, if not all, of the core elements discussed in this chapter. This means asking whether fostering transformative learning in general and the core elements more specifically rests on the assumption of a learner-centered approach to teaching. Are learner-centered teaching and fostering transformative learning one and the same? A place to begin exploring these questions resides in the theoretical orientation of transformative learning held by the educator. In other words, how do the various orientations conceptualize the role of the teacher in relationship to the purpose of transformative learning? How is learner-centered teaching conceptualized by the different theoretical orientations? These questions and others need to be resolved before learner-centered teaching can be seen as an essential element in fostering transformative learning. I hope that this brief discussion will challenge readers to begin to study this approach more thoroughly and shed greater light on the relationship of learner-centered teaching to fostering transformative learning.

It is clear that much remains unknown about the practice of fostering transformative learning, and so it should not be practiced naively or without forethought or planning. It often requires intentional action, personal risk, a genuine concern for the learners' betterment, and the ability to draw on a variety of methods and techniques that help create a classroom environment that supports personal growth and, for others, social change (Taylor, 2006). Those who venture into this arena will have to trust their teaching instincts, since there are few clear signposts or guidelines, and develop an appreciation for and awareness of their own assumptions and beliefs about the purpose of fostering transformative learning and the impact on practice. Through this

awareness and by engaging in a reflective practice, these core elements give meaning to transformative learning.

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